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4. OCCURRENCE OF THE BROWN PALM CIVET IN THE WET FOREST OF KALAKAD MUNDANTHURAI TIGER RESERVE, TAMIL NADU

The Western Ghats harbour many rare and endemic fauna. However, distribution, status and ecology of many of them remain unclear. In this note, the occurrence and status of the brown palm civet (*Paradoxurus jerdoni*) in the evergreen forest of Kakachi (c. 1250m) in the Kalakad Mundanthurai Tiger Reserve of south India is discussed.

The brown palm civet (*Paradoxurus jerdoni*) is endemic to the Western Ghats and is an inhabitant of the high elevation forests (Jerdon, 1874). Though not considered as rare as the endangered Malabar civet (*Viverra civettina*), very little is known about its status or distribution in the Agasthyamalai region of the southern Western Ghats (Ashraf *et al.* 1993).

In the Kakachi-Upper Kodayar area of the KMTR, the brown palm civet appears to be fairly common. Over the six years (1990-1996) of our stay in Kodayar, we have sighted this animal more than ten times during the night and only twice during the day. Recently in April 1996, we sighted an individual in the canopy of the evergreen forest, basking in the sunshine at noon and later eating the flowers of *Cullenia exarillata* until late in the afternoon. This animal was lethargic even in our presence and was probably sick.

Our sightings of the civet have mostly been on or near flowering or fruiting trees during the night. They regularly feed on the flowers of

Cullenia exarillata and ripe fruits of *Elaeocarpus munronii* and *Palaquium ellipticum* whenever available and probably serve as an important seed disperser in this area.

The civets breed in this area in summer. A pair of new born young of this civet was found deep inside the forest at Kakachi in May 1992. We noticed the pups because of their yelping call. They were in the litter, blind and probably not more than a week old. There was no sign of injury, but unfortunately our attempts to rear them failed. Like the adults in the area, the pups also had a white tipped tail.

Being nocturnal and restricted to the dense forest of the evergreen and moist deciduous type, the brown palm civet has rarely been sighted. We observed that it is an important contributor to the dynamics of tree regeneration in the wet forest. Hence, continued protection of the species and its habitat is very essential.

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